

# LOWER MISSISSIPPI SURVEY



## THE TUNICA TREASURE

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## FOREWORD

This pamphlet is a preliminary statement on a remarkable group of artifacts which is currently on loan to the Peabody Museum by the collector. It is hoped that this collection will be acquired, and in that event further -- and far more definitive -- reports will be forthcoming under the rubric of the Lower Mississippi Survey.

In addition to the study of the collection, Stephen Williams and I are planning a field expedition to Mississippi for next summer, one of the objectives of which will be to locate the burial site from which the artifacts came. Limited excavations there and at the associated village(s) will then be carried out in order to establish the archaeological background.

JPB  
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Abstract

An extraordinary cache of European and aboriginal artifacts, deposited as grave offerings by the Tunica Indians of southwestern Mississippi, has recently come to light. The great quantity and variety of the artifacts will provide invaluable data on the pattern of French contact in the Lower Mississippi Valley during the first half of the 18th century. Furthermore, the European artifacts will set a firm historic dateline for the aboriginal artifacts, which in turn can be utilized in a direct historic approach to answer some key questions relating to the late prehistory of the valley.

The left bank of the Mississippi River, from Vicksburg south to the Louisiana border, is an area of considerable importance to the study of the protohistoric and historic periods of aboriginal occupation along this most important waterway. The homeland of the Natchez was there and of some of their contemporaries, both friend (e.g., Yazoo, Koroa, Tioux) and foe (Tunica). The interactions between these tribal groups are relatively well documented in the early French accounts of the contact period.

The Tunica are a tribal group almost as well known as the Natchez. When first contacted by the early French explorers, they were located on the Yazoo River in the vicinity of Vicksburg. In 1706, the Tunica left the Yazoo and, somehow bypassing their enemies, removed themselves to a location below Natchez (Fig. 1). In so doing, they settled among the Houma, a group which seems to have preceded the Tunica in moving downriver from the Yazoo region. The general location of this settlement has recently been identified through the discovery of an associated burial cache. Although we do not yet know the exact location of this burial site, we believe it

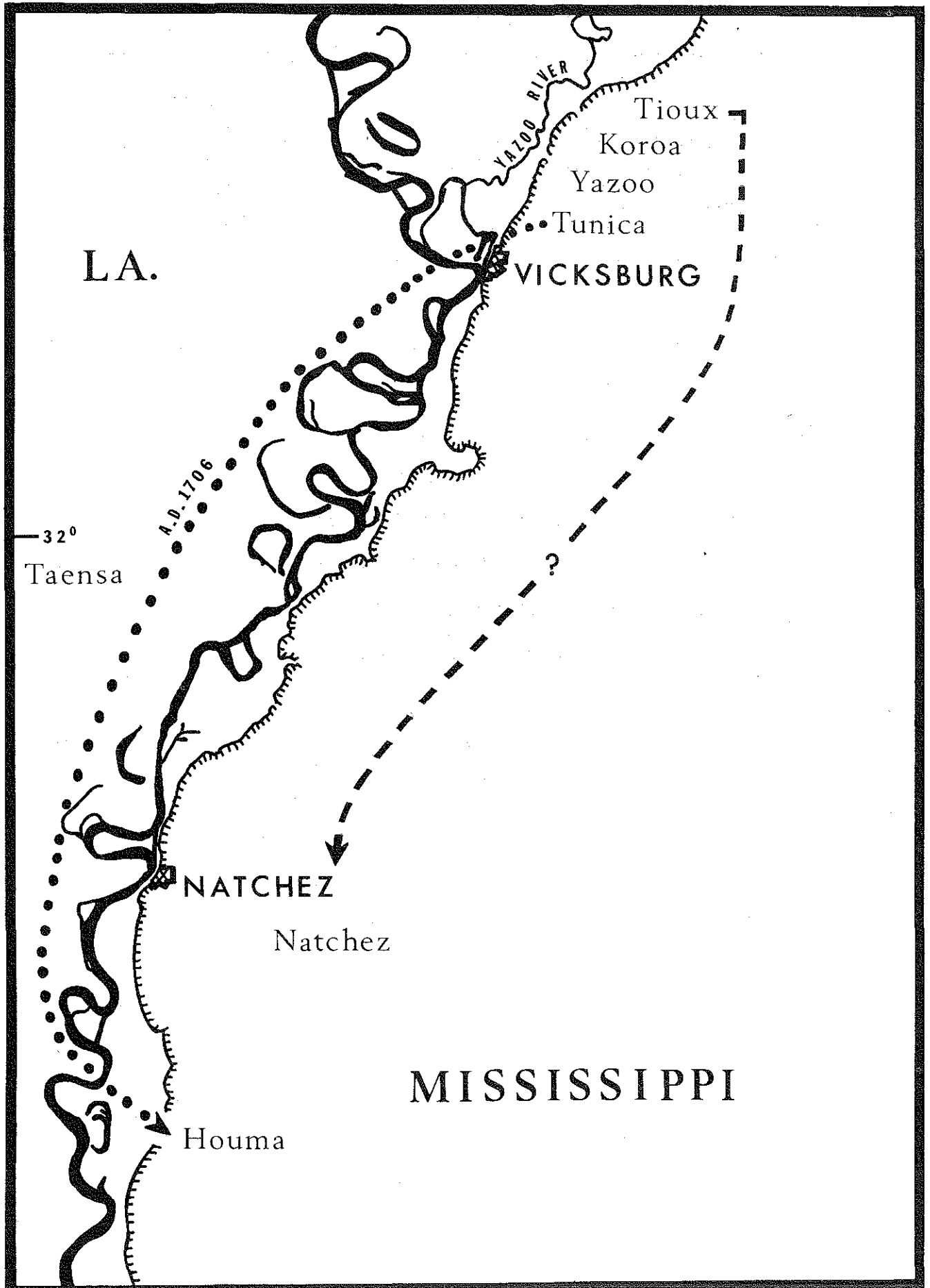


Fig. 1. Location of Indian Tribes in SW Mississippi in Early 18th Century.

represents a single deposition, or series of related depositions over a reasonably restricted period. The cache, itself, is a remarkable collection which exhibits an extraordinary quantity and variety of European trade goods as well as native pottery and other artifacts (Figs. 2 - 5; also see the Appendix for a general inventory).

An explanation for this wealth of trade goods may be found in the French historical records of the period. For example, in December 1721, Father Charlevoix -- historian, of New France -- visited the Tunica in their new location, and among other notes made the following pertinent observations:

The cabin of the chief is very much adorned on the outside for the cabin of a savage...The inside is dark, and I observed nothing in it but some boxes, which they assured me were full of clothes and money. The chief [Cahura-Joligo, ally of the French against the Natchez, and predecessor of Bride-les-Boeufs (see cover)] received us very politely; he was dressed in the French fashion, and seemed to be not at all uneasy in that habit. Of all the savages of Canada there is none so much depended on by our commandants as this chief. He loves our nation, and has no cause to repent of the services he has rendered it. He trades with the French, whom he supplies with horses and fowls, and he understands his trade very well. He has learned of us to hoard up money, and he is reckoned very rich. (Hist.Coll. L. 1851: 173).

This particular passage has given rise to the local legend of the "Tunica Treasure," and that, we believe, is what has been found. Although no money has come to our attention -- if indeed there was any significant amount, which is doubtful in what was basically a colonial bartering economy -- there is a tremendous wealth of European artifacts, a true "treasure" to the aboriginal.



Fig. 2. European Ceramics: Westerwald (l.) and Faience (r.).



Fig. 3. European Ceramics: "Majolica" and related wares.



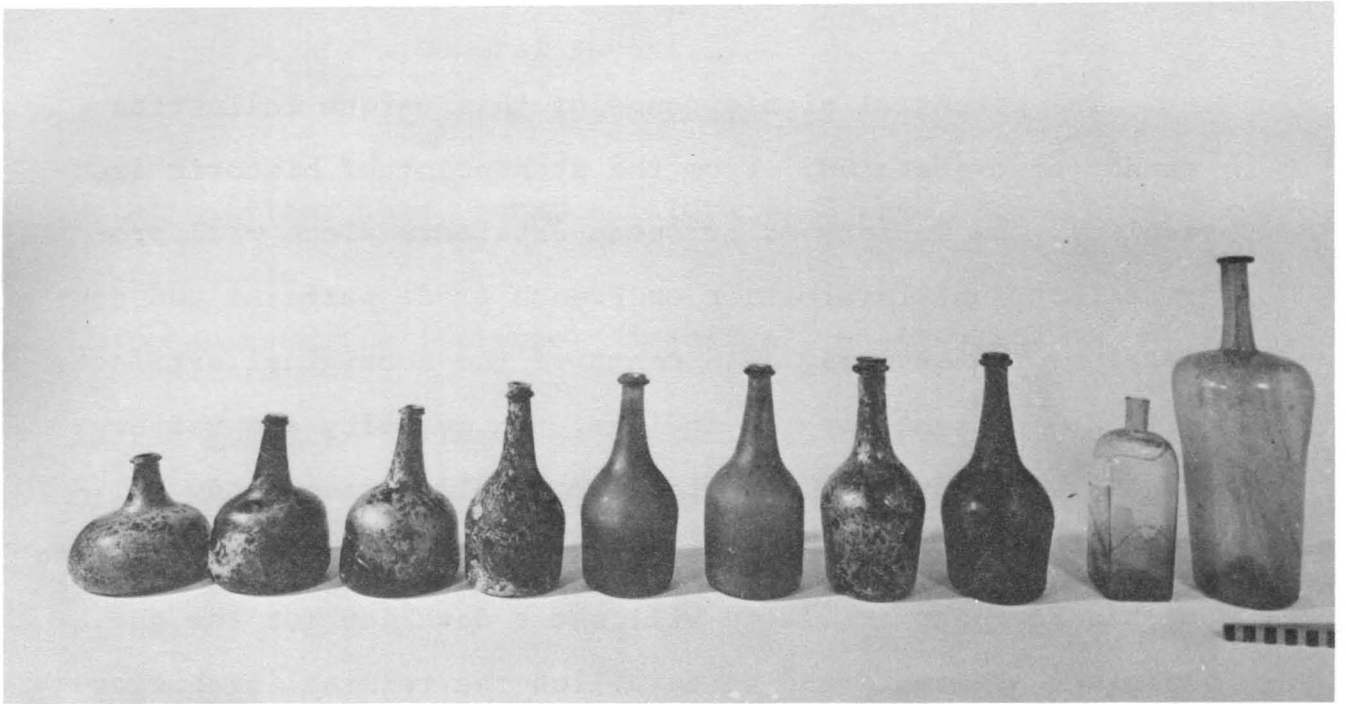


Fig. 4. European Bottles: wine and gin.



Fig. 5. Aboriginal Pottery: Caddoan (l.), Natchezan (c.), Tunican (r.).

The potential significance of this unique collection cannot be overstated. From the standpoint of historic archaeology, the variety of European artifacts alone will provide important information on French trade patterns and connections in the early 18th century; the aboriginal artifacts will do the same for the Indians; the quantity and variety of all artifacts will provide a controlled case study of an early historic contact situation. And finally, the dating of the European artifacts will set a dateline for the aboriginal artifacts and so establish the terminal prehistory of the Tunicas, a group whom we believe to have played an important role during late prehistoric events in the Lower Mississippi Valley.

APPENDIX

General Inventory

(figures approximate)

Metal kettles, pots, tubs, skillets (1/3 iron, 2/3 copper)	200
Pewter bowls	3
European ceramics (faience, "majolica", westerwald, bellarmine)	100
Indian pottery (Tunican, Natchezan, Caddoan)	75
Glass bottles (wine, gin)	20
Muskets (est. from parts)	20
Pistol	1
Lead balls	500
Gun flints	50
Grenade	1
Hoes	35
Axes	25
Knives (and sword blades?)	15
Drawknives	2
Adzes	2
Sickles	2
Spade	1
Scissors	10
Spoons	4
Mirrors	10
Chests (keys, locks, hinges)	2

Misc. hardware	
Basketry and fabric	
Kaolin pipe (British)	1
Catlinite pipes (aboriginal)	3
Shell ear pins and beads (aboriginal)	200
Brass and copper "C" bracelets	200
Brass and copper bells	60
Misc. metal ornaments (crucifixes, ear and finger rings, tinklers, buttons, etc.)	25
Vermillion	5 lbs.
Glass beads	200,000